

## Chapter 4. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment component of the *SCORP 2000* is a tool for local and regional planners to use in targeting areas of critical need, whether in acquisitions, facility improvements, or programming changes. Needs assessments are created by evaluating available supply along with current and future demand. Analysis at the regional level creates regional profiles of needs, which communities are required to consider when applying for grants under the Land and Water Conservation Fund and state Self-Help and Urban Self-Help programs.

Regional profiles of needs are useful as indicators, not as specific and absolute predictors. Our intent in developing the needs analysis was to provide information on demand, both met and unmet, and supply that will point out areas of need that should be considered in planning and grant applications. Our intent was not to create a set of imperatives or a specific local plan that communities could follow, but rather to supply communities with statewide and regional data that should be considered and perhaps modified by particular local needs. The SCORP data should be used as one of many reference materials as communities prepare their local municipal Open Space and Recreation Plans.

Every SCORP is intended to help direct the optimal investment of funds and effort in the protection and enhancement of recreation resources. The *SCORP 2000* is no exception. This chapter provides information designed to help planners at all levels make wise decisions in selecting areas most in need of available funds. This needs assessment is presented in the simplest terms: what people want most and what efforts they are willing to support. A single plan cannot take into account all of the differences in need among communities across the Commonwealth. Instead, this chapter, like the report as a whole, provides general information and indicators of need that communities can use to assist in their planning efforts, which can then be tailored to meet specific needs.

The supply and demand analyses tell us quite a lot about what open space and recreation is and what it should be. Attempts are often made to mathematically calculate the difference between supply and demand to develop an estimate of need. No attempt was made to develop complicated equations to predict recreation needs for the *SCORP 2000*; rather this report relies on basic information obtained directly from recreation users - the public. This report provides a series of estimates of need based on the findings of the 1995 demand study. These estimates provide an indication of the recreation preferences of the public, both statewide and regionally.

Needs in this chapter are described in three ways: through an estimate of unmet need, through a calculation of inferred need, and through a funding preference rating. Again, all of these assessments are based on the results of the 1995 demand study. Unmet need was established by first asking survey respondents what recreation facilities would best serve them and their families. Responses were recorded, and inferred need was developed by recoding the facility responses into their related resource areas. Finally, funding preferences were developed through a question that asked where the respondent would most like to see additional public dollars spent for recreation and open space.

### Statewide Unmet Need for Recreation Facilities

Overall, the greatest statewide need is greatest for trail-based activities, with walking and road biking indicated as the individual activities in greatest demand. Field-based activities rank second as priority needs for new facilities, with playground activity, tennis, and golfing ranked at the top of the activity need list. Finally, a strong need exists for water-based activities, with swimming indicated as the facility most needed statewide.

In simple rank order, the ten most needed or desired facilities mentioned by respondents are:

<i>Desired Facility</i>	<i>Percent of Respondents Using the Facility</i>
1. Swimming	14.8%
2. Walking	13.8%
3. Road Biking	12.9%
4. Playground Activity	9.9%
5. Tennis	8.0%
6. Golfing	7.9%
7. Hiking	7.1%
8. Mountain Biking	6.7%

9. Basketball	6.2%
10. Baseball	5.3%

### **Need Expressed by Non-White Ethnic Groups**

Significant differences exist in activity-based needs among ethnic groups, according to perceptions of need. The interest expressed in more field-based facilities, particularly for basketball and playgrounds was much higher among people of color than among the statewide sample. Conversely, the trail and wilderness based activities were of significantly less need among these groups than the state sample. As noted in the Demand section of this report, these activity preferences may reflect the more urban locations of these populations and a lack of access or exposure to some activities than a disinterest in the activity per se.

African-Americans expressed significantly more interest than the state sample in facilities for volleyball (6.6% versus 1.1% statewide), football (5.0 versus 1.4%), and basketball (15.8% versus 6.2%), yet not so much as Other/Multi-racial groups did in basketball (23.0%) and tennis (26.2%).

Hispanics expressed significantly higher levels of interest in facilities for basketball and playground activities, along with somewhat greater levels for baseball, soccer, mountain biking and swimming.

### **Need Expressed by People with Disabilities**

Households with people with disabilities report usage rates that are very similar to the statewide average. They report significantly lower participation rates only for golfing. When asked to indicate how a domestic disability affects their household's recreation activities, responses fell into two categories. Many responses emphasized that the disability had little or no affect on the recreation. Some responses suggest that, for disabilities relating to mobility, usage of recreation areas is lower.

### **Regional Needs Patterns**

Regionally, facility needs are similar to statewide needs, with trail-based activities at the top of all regional lists. Field-based and water-based activities follow in need and are too close to accurately rank. However, there are notable differences among regions and between regions and statewide results as indicated in the table below. Most regional results show a clear relationship between the facilities available in an area and the facilities respondents would most like to see more of (that is, those in greatest supply are in least demand and those in least supply are in greatest demand). Land managers must carefully consider these needs, and thoroughly evaluate if existing facilities can support this demand before committing to new facilities. Programmatic changes may fulfill some portion of the expressed need.

<p><b>Figure 26.</b> <b>Need for New Recreational Facilities by</b> <b>SCORP Region</b></p>								
<i>Facilities for:</i>	<i>Statewide</i>	<i>Cape Cod and Islands</i>	<i>Southeastern</i>	<i>Metropolitan Boston</i>	<i>Northeastern</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Connecticut Valley</i>	<i>Berkshires</i>
<b>Field Based Activities</b>								
Baseball	5.3	2.2	6.7	5.9	5.3	2.8	4.3	4.6
Basketball	6.2	2.7	1.8	8.7	8.3	4.0	4.1	2.4
Football	1.4	0.0	1.1	2.2	1.1	0.0	0.8	1.4
Golfing	7.9	5.2	10.7	6.3	9.1	8.3	8.2	11.4
Ice skating (rink)	2.4	0.0	2.7	2.5	4.5	1.2	0.5	1.1
Playground activity	9.9	8.7	8.3	9.0	13.8	10.2	11.3	6.1
Soccer	3.0	0.0	4.0	2.7	4.7	2.9	1.1	2.0
Tennis	8.0	7.3	4.3	11.8	7.6	3.3	5.1	6.0
Toddler activity (at tot lots)	1.6	2.1	2.1	1.0	2.7	1.9	1.3	0.9
Volleyball	1.1	0.0	0.6	1.7	0.7	0.4	1.1	1.1
<b>Passive Recreational Activities</b>								
Photography / painting	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.2
Picnicking	3.1	2.1	1.4	3.2	0.7	5.3	5.5	7.7
Sightseeing, tours, events	2.3	0.8	1.6	3.7	0.7	0.8	2.8	2.3
Sunbathing	1.1	4.5	1.6	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Watch wildlife, nature study	2.2	4.1	3.4	1.2	1.4	3.5	3.9	1.1
<b>Trail-Based Activities</b>								
Biking (mountain)	6.7	3.8	5.3	6.2	6.1	8.5	10.3	9.2
Biking (road)	12.9	15.5	17.6	10.5	14.1	12.1	14.5	6.8
Horseback riding	1.2	0.0	1.7	1.1	0.9	1.3	1.7	2.8
Off-road vehicle driving	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Roller blading/skating	3.0	4.4	2.6	3.5	3.2	1.5	2.8	1.5
Running/jogging	3.0	1.5	4.5	4.2	1.1	0.3	2.4	2.8
Skiing (cross country)	1.3	0.0	0.6	0.7	0.0	3.4	4.1	4.6
Skiing (downhill)	1.3	1.7	0.6	0.8	1.6	2.5	1.8	2.7
Snowmobiling	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.2	1.8	1.4	0.7	1.1
Walking	13.8	9.0	12.6	14.8	11.8	16.5	13.9	11.3
<b>Water-Based Activities</b>								
Boating (motorized)	1.7	4.2	1.4	1.4	1.8	2.7	2.1	0.0
Boating (non-motorized)	1.0	2.4	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.9	1.3	0.0
Canoeing, rafting	1.5	1.0	1.9	1.2	1.6	2.2	0.9	3.2
Fishing	4.3	4.7	5.9	2.3	6.5	3.5	5.5	11.7
Hockey (natural water bodies)	1.6	0.0	0.6	2.6	2.0	0.7	0.0	0.0
Ice skating (pond, lake, or natural water bodies)	1.0	0.0	0.9	1.3	1.4	0.3	0.4	0.0
Sailing	0.6	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.0
Surfing	0.2	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Swimming	14.8	17.5	14.8	14.9	12.6	17.0	13.8	18.9
Water skiing / jet skiing	0.2	1.2	0.0	0.1	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
<b>Wilderness Activities</b>								
Camping	2.9	3.0	3.8	0.9	3.4	4.8	5.3	8.5
Hiking	7.1	4.6	10.2	3.9	4.4	14.4	10.7	12.2
Hunting	0.3	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.6	3.8

Among the readily observed regional differences, residents from Metropolitan Boston mention needs for tennis significantly more often than the statewide sample as they do baseball to a slightly lesser degree. Hiking was little mentioned as a need, and yet this region expressed strong dissatisfaction with hiking facilities visited.

On the Cape and Islands, swimming is also the most frequently mentioned need. In the Southeastern Region where swimming (14.8%) is also expressed as a need, it is eclipsed by road biking (17.6%), the high for biking statewide. Golfing, at 10.7%, is the next most frequently mentioned need. Interesting, while biking and swimming facilities have seen modest to little increase respectively, the marketplace has been responding strongly to the perceived interest in golfing. No doubt, golfing is a special case where income potential is quite high, not the case for swimming and biking facilities. While no specific study of the number of golf facilities constructed since the survey was completed in 1995 has been undertaken, both ordinary experience and even a cursory review of MEPA (Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act) filings since 1995 indicate a clear surge in this recreation activity. In the town of Plymouth alone, a high growth area of the state, there are 7 new 18-hole courses completed or in the planning stages.

In the Northeastern Region, road biking (14.1%) and playground activity (13.8%) were the highest ranked needs, and ice skating, while comparatively low at 4.5%, was higher than any other region.

The Central Region identified walking at 16.5%, swimming (17.0%) and hiking (14.4%) as primary desires. Jogging facilities, at .3%, were mentioned significantly less frequently than in other parts of the state.

A distinctive pattern emerges in the Connecticut Valley Region, including the hilltowns of Hampshire, Hampden and Franklin Counties. Hiking (10.7%) and playground activity (11.3%) ranked high with swimming and road biking, but also hiking, mountain biking (10.3%), and cross country skiing (4.1%) are ranked higher than in any other region.

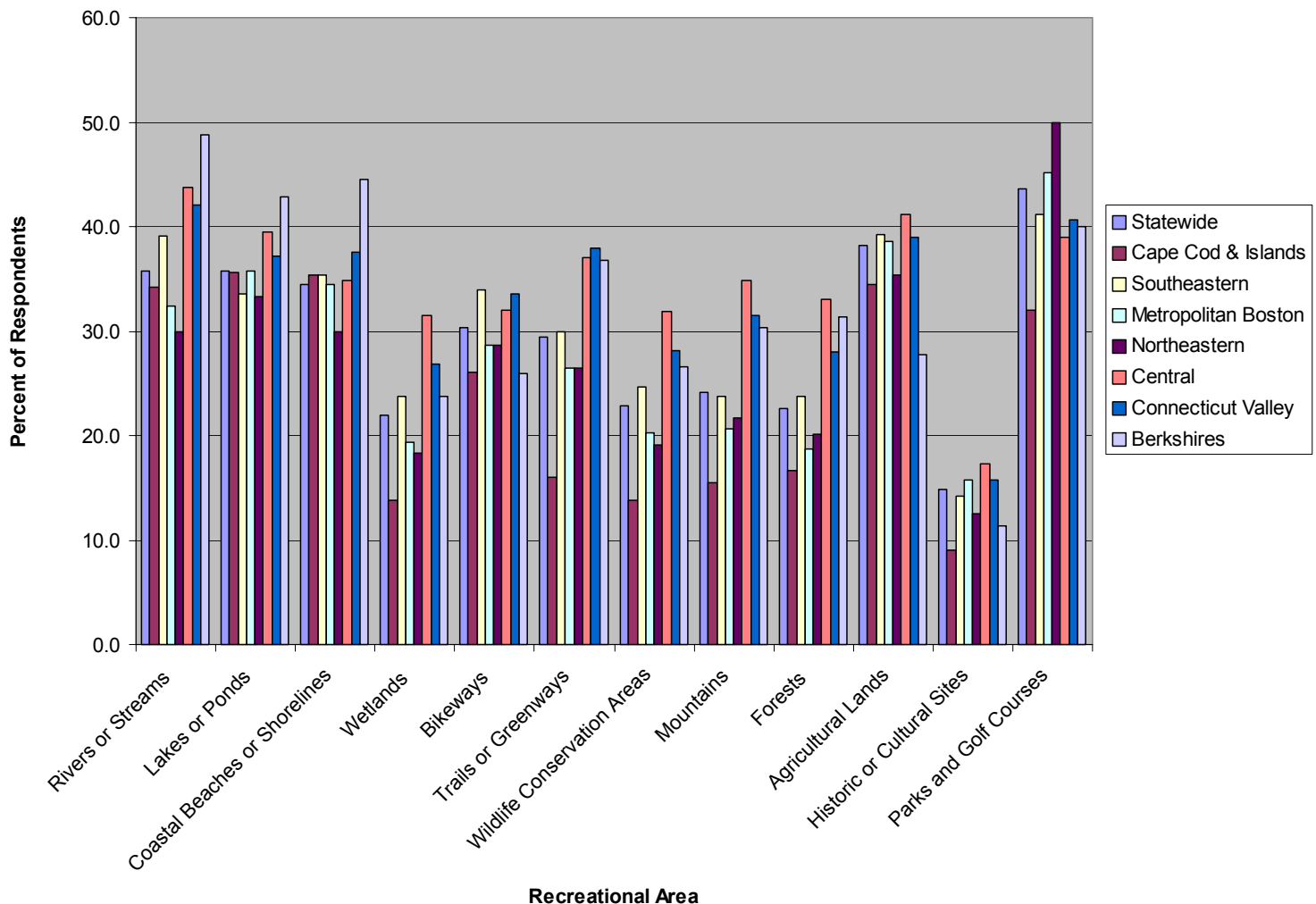
## Inferred Need for Resource Areas

Each type of resource area can support a variety of the activities identified above. Therefore, it is important to consider the resource base needed to support various activities. This format is also consistent with the orientation of the *SCORP 2000* toward resource usage and need and should provide a more convenient format for comparison with other demand findings.

The following chart, Inferred Need for New Resource Areas, was calculated from the facility need identified in the previous table. Needs for types of recreation areas were calculated by recoding the activities into related outdoor recreation areas. The basis for this recoding was the collective responses to a question regarding what the respondent did at the facility they had visited. The assumption in the calculation is that the respondents, by expressing interest in new facilities for various activities, implicitly show interest in additional types of outdoor recreation areas.

Given the method used to obtain these findings, and the fact that opportunities exist for double counting of multiple activities into some types of areas, the results should be interpreted with caution, and should not be the sole basis for making recommendations for new acquisition of resources. However, the results may be useful in showing relative interest, or desire for, outdoor recreation areas.

**Figure 27. Inferred Need for New Recreational Areas**



Statewide, the broad category of golf courses, neighborhood parks, playgrounds and tot lots is identified as the greatest resource need (44%). These resources rank first collectively only in the most heavily populated regions of the state, Metropolitan Boston, Northeastern, and Southeastern Regions, but still near the top in the other regions. Surprisingly, agricultural lands rank second in resource need. This may simply be a testimony to the versatility of agricultural land in addressing two of the most popular recreation activities, walking and

sightseeing. Water resources, as expected, also rank high for recreation need. These include rivers and streams (36%), and lakes and ponds (36%), as well as coastal beaches and shorelines (35%).

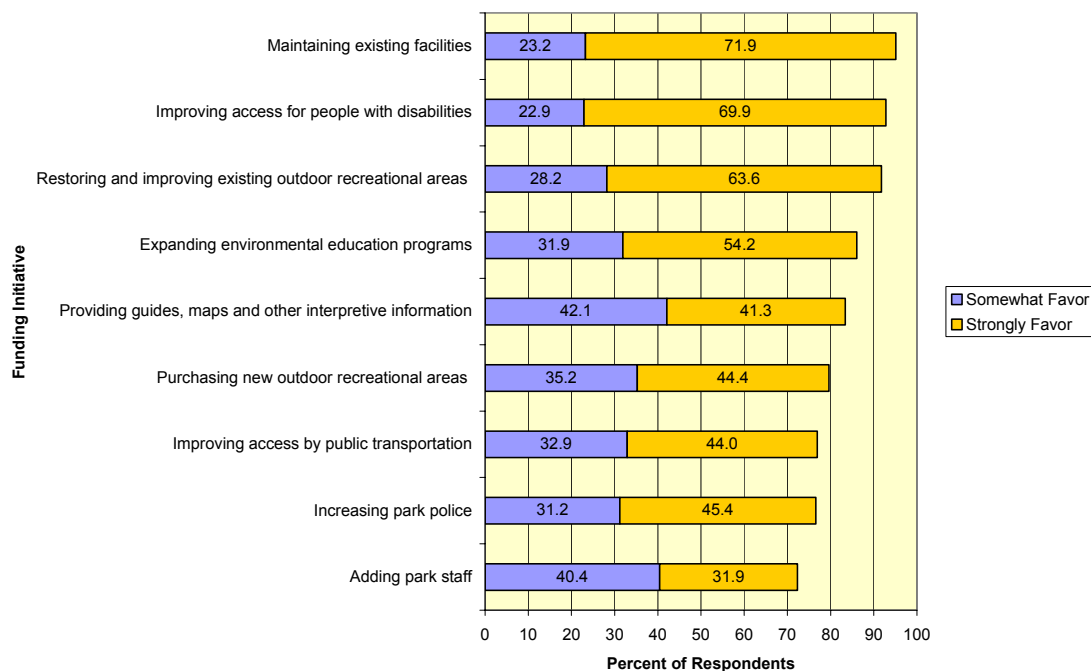
Although they ranked third in experience levels for the last 12 months (participation rates), historic resources show the lowest level of need. This may reflect a belief among survey respondents that historic sites are already plentiful enough for recreation purposes. But it may also relate to the coding of activities into resources. The number of recreation activities specifically associated with historic resource areas, such as sightseeing, some walking and photography and painting, is low compared to activities associated with the other resource types.

Regardless of interpretation of this data, it is important to note the difference between activity preferences versus “need” for new facilities. For example, sight seeing is among the most popular activities (54%), but not seen as needing new “facilities”, presumably because there are many scenic places within the respondents’ reach. However, today’s scenic areas, whether they are historic, agricultural, aquatic, or mountainous, may be unprotected open space and therefore not accessible in the future. Thus, in deliberations over future investment, policy makers must consider the extent to which present “facilities” or “resources” will continue to be available.

## Funding Preferences

Funding preferences should be considered concurrently with facility and resource need rankings. Two measures of preference were used concerning nine specific funding initiatives pertaining to outdoor recreation areas. First, favorability ratings were obtained (degree to which certain actions were favored or opposed). Once respondents had expressed their favor or disfavor, they were given the opportunity to select two initiatives of the nine that they would most like to see funded.

**Figure 28. Statewide Favorability Ratings for New Funding Initiatives**



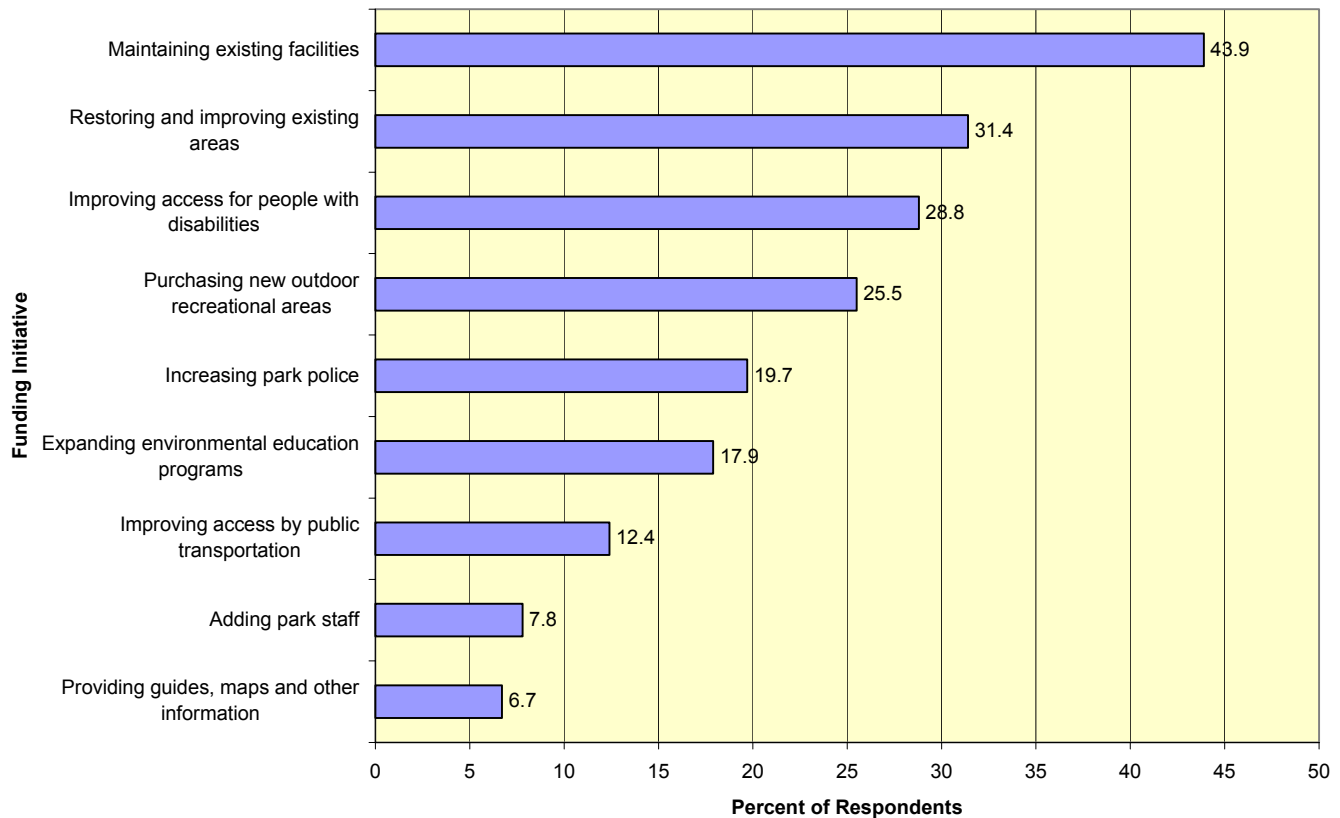
A considerably different picture emerges when the percentage of respondents who strongly favor and those who somewhat favor the nine options are contrasted and combined. In terms of those who strongly favor new funding for recreation, maintenance is the most favored funding preference statewide (72%), showing up as such in the Southeastern, Northeast, Central, and Connecticut Valley Regions. In all other regions, it is the number two preference. Access for people with disabilities ranks second statewide (70%), with restoration and improvement (64%) a close third.

Most strikingly, the fact that all nine options receive well in excess of a super-majority of favorable responses is in itself a powerful finding. The variations among the options also dwindles from a spread of 40 percentage points to just 22 points. Moreover, the order of preferred options changes among those who somewhat favor

increased funding. In this group, providing guides and information ranks highest, followed closely by adding park staff (40.4%) and purchasing new outdoor recreation areas (35.1%).

This analysis is supported by the second funding preference question, which took the form of asking respondents to specify which two of the nine funding initiatives they would prefer to receive additional state funding. This form of question forces respondents to prioritize a subset of initiatives among the many that may appeal to them. Here, maintaining existing facilities remained the highest preference (44%), logically, but restoring and improving existing areas moved to second (31%), with improving access third (29%) and purchasing new areas fourth (26%), versus sixth when ranked singly. These findings are very consistent with the favorability findings. As above, the purchase of new recreation areas is shown to have more support than might be expected from the results of the “strongly favor” favorability ratings alone.

**Figure 29. Statewide Preference for New Funding Initiatives**



These differences may reflect, in part, the fact that the largest part of the population lives within metropolitan areas where maintenance is presumably most sorely needed, while suburban and rural residences have more generally adequate access to facilities, which may be less intensively used. Great care should be taken in considering these findings; however, the Metropolitan Boston, Northeastern and Central Regions received the strongest overall favorability ratings for purchasing new outdoor recreation areas (80 to 81 %). This was even higher than in the highest growth rate regions of the Southeastern and Cape and Islands. Does this response pattern reflect the respondents weighting of recreation versus conservation lands, or of these resources generally versus other growth demands, such as schools, roads, water supply protection? Local surveys performed in connection with master plan and open space plan updates, along with public opinion surveys performed by non-profit organizations such as the Massachusetts Audubon Society and The Nature Conservancy may help in understanding and explaining these preferences more fully.

Regionally, access for the disabled and restoration are ranked closely together. In the Metropolitan Boston Region, improved access for the disabled is the number one funding preference, while restoration and improvement is ranked first in the Berkshires and on Cape Cod and the Islands. Public transportation is significantly favored in the Metropolitan Boston Region compared to other regions, indicating the critical role public transportation plays (or should play) in providing access for urban residents to recreation and open space.

It is interesting to note that the need for additional staff was ranked at the bottom (lowest priority) in nearly every region. However, the respondents also indicated they wanted to see expanded programs and maintenance efforts, citing cleanliness most often as their principal cause of dissatisfaction with existing facilities. Although these efforts would require additional staff, respondents did not make the connection between staffing levels and program expansion.

## **Drawing Conclusions**

The information presented in this chapter is meant to provide guidance only. The findings are not intended to predict where investments in open space and recreation should be placed in each and every region of the state. The priority needs rankings are based upon the results of the demand study and should be representative of the population at-large. Rankings are based on state and regional samples. However, specific local needs may be different from regional and statewide needs, and may not be accurately measured by this study.

Readers should also consider the supply and demand chapters to gain further insights into state, regional, and local needs. There are a number of considerations that go into planning decisions, and the supply and demand data provide useful information to aid in the decision-making process.

Resource and facility needs are only part of the total priority plan. The following chapter outlines the critical issues in recreation and open space across the Commonwealth and describes steps that can be taken to address these issues. Most of the issues and recommendations support the needs assessment findings in this chapter and provide direction for future recreation planning and programming efforts.